

4/23/2007 This Week in Congress

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April 23, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." Our nation mourns this week after the shootings at Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Virginia. My prayers are with the families, faculty, students and staff affected by this tragic event.

This week, the House passed legislation to give the District of Columbia a vote in the House of Representatives and legislation to improve our nation's waterways. Also passed this week was a bill to allow shareholders to have a say on the compensation awarded to corporate executives.

"Days of Remembrance" - Commemorating the Victims of the Holocaust

This week was our nation's annual commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust established by Congress as "Days of Remembrance". I observed their memory by visiting the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. The death and dehumanization experienced by Jews is moving when seen through the pictures and stories displayed in that building. Those who know about the Jews' suffering often repeat the phrase "Never Again" - even now as genocide is happening in Darfur, Sudan. On Wednesday, I returned to the museum to hear President Bush honor the Holocaust victims by addressing the present day genocide. [Click here to read the text of a speech I delivered to the House of Representatives later that day about this issue.](#) I want to make sure my colleagues do not forget what happened 60 years ago and help

make them aware of the current situation in Sudan.

Working to Modernize Guard and Reserve Benefits

I have sponsored legislation to modernize benefits for Americans serving in the National Guard and Reserve. Though close to 500,000 members of the Guard and Reserve have been called up since September 11, their benefits do not always match their increased service to our country.

Legislation I have sponsored would lower the age of retirement for guardsmen and reservists who have served at least 20 years. Unlike active duty forces that have no age restrictions on retirement once their 20 years of service is complete, Guard and Reserve members are ineligible to receive retirement pay until they reach age 60. This legislation allows members to begin drawing their retirement pay at age 55 rather than at age 60. I am also supportive of alternative legislation that will reduce the age for receipt of retirement pay by 3 month increments for every 90 days a Guard or Reserve member spends on active duty after September 11, 2001. This allows members to retire as early as age 50. I have also sponsored legislation to enhance education benefits by allowing activated guardsmen and reservists to earn the same G.I. Bill benefits as active duty soldiers and enabling them to use those benefits after they leave the service.

From towns across Kansas, our citizen soldiers have stepped up to play an increasingly vital role in the defense of our nation, from protecting our freedoms in Iraq and Afghanistan to protecting our borders. We are asking members of the Guard and Reserve to serve alongside and take the same risks as active duty members. Their contribution has changed and so should their compensation. The reality of today's military demands we modernize Guard and Reserve benefits to show our appreciation to these brave men and women and to improve our military's ability to recruit and retain forces.

Counties Meet with USDA Officials to Discuss Farm Service Agency Office Closures

This week, representatives of Kansas counties affected by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) office closings were in Washington, D.C. to discuss the office closings with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials. The group met with Floyd Gaibler, Deputy Undersecretary for Farm and Foreign Agriculture, and Steve Connolly, FSA Deputy Administrator for Field Operations. A separate group of representatives were also able to meet with Theresa Lasseter, Administrator of the FSA, in Kansas City. I visited with Administrator Lasseter after the meeting to thank her for taking time to listen to the Kansas perspective on this matter.

Both meetings allowed Kansans to voice their opposition to the state FSA's current proposal to close 11 FSA offices in Kansas and submit their own ideas to improve service. The plan is expected to be submitted to the Administrator within the next month.

Attending Junction City Mutual Self Help Housing Program Presentation

I joined State Director Chuck Banks and other representatives from USDA Rural Development on Monday to present a grant check to Junction City officials that will assist the city's Mutual Self Help Housing Program. The USDA program helps bring new, affordable homes to rural communities, allowing families who otherwise might not be able to afford a home to do so through the contribution of labor. With the assistance of USDA and Junction City, members of the community, including Junction City High School (JCHS) students, have helped build 35 single family homes since 2003. The JCHS Industrial Technology class completed a home on their own this year.

I appreciated the opportunity to join Junction City Mayor Mike Rhoads, City Manager Rod Barnes, Assistant City Manager Mike Guinn, Commissioners Terry Heldstab and Ken Talley, and Todd Fike, the Director of Junction City's Mutual Self Help Housing Program, for this special event.

Former U.S. Senator Howard Baker Receives the 2007 Dole Leadership Award

This weekend, I was on the University of Kansas campus at the Dole Institute of Politics for the presentation of its 2007 Dole Leadership Award to former U.S. Senator Howard Baker. As former Senate Majority Leader, White House Chief of Staff to President Ronald Reagan and U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Senator Baker is most deserving of this award. His dedication to public service benefited the U.S. and countries around the world. Senator Baker also has a special Kansas connection, as he is married to former Kansas Senator Nancy Kassebaum Baker. I enjoyed the opportunity to attend this event and congratulate Senator Baker on this award.

Kansans Have Opportunity to Shape Eisenhower Memorial Design

Plans to honor Kansan and former President Dwight D. Eisenhower with a memorial in our nation's capital are moving forward. Since the House passed legislation I introduced last year that granted site approval for a monument, the Eisenhower Memorial Commission has been working on the design. Kansans are encouraged to share their thoughts on what themes and concepts should be emphasized in the memorial by completing an online questionnaire. [Click here](#) to give your input.

Hearing from Former Senator and Presidential Candidate Fred Thompson

Former Senator and possible presidential candidate Fred Thompson was on Capitol Hill this week. I had the opportunity to listen to his views on leading our nation.

In the Office

Several Kansas State Representatives were in our nation's capital as part of the National Conference of State Legislators. I met with Kansas House Speaker Melvin Neufeld of Ingalls, Minority Leader Dennis McKinney of Greensburg, House Assistant Minority Leader Jim Ward of Wichita and State Representatives Josh Svaty of Ellsworth and Doug Gatewood of Columbus. Kansas rent-to-own business owners were in to advocate for the Consumer Rental-Purchase Agreement Act of 2007. In with the group were Wayne Chambers and Jim and Debbie Brown of Wichita, Marty Auble of Topeka, Jess Fisher of Arkansas City, Chuck and Arlyn Kuluva of Kansas City, Gloria Homeier-Schwien of Russell and Janet Schmidt of Beloit.

Larry Dreiling of Hays was in Washington, D.C. this week attending the annual North American Agricultural Journalists meeting. Larry is a senior field editor with the High Plains Journal and stopped by to talk about current agriculture issues. Kerry McCue of Hays, Terry David of Lyons, Chris Way of Parsons and John Hultgren of Abilene were in representing the Kansas Emergency Management Services (EMS) Association to discuss federal tax treatment of EMS and emergency management vehicles, as well as other first responder issues. Julie Mulvihill and Annette Thornburgh of Topeka were in with the Kansas Humanities Council to tell me about educational programs available to Kansans.

Bill Hanson and Steve Harms of Manhattan and Sherrill Tubbs of Scott City were in with the American Association of Crop Insurers to discuss issues associated with the crop insurance industry. Arianne Fisher of Plainville and Cole Smith of Natoma were in with the People to People educational program to learn more about my role in Congress. Chris Meinhardt of Topeka was in to talk about the need to support the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. Paul Horel of Overland Park was in with the Crop Insurance Research Bureau to discuss issues associated with the crop insurance industry.

Employees of several employee-owned S corporations met with me to share their personal stories of how employee stock ownership plans have benefited them. In with the group were George Soptick, Wayne Bargary and Mike Cheek of Kansas City; Greg Klein and Grace Obholz of Salina; Jim Schorgl of Leawood; Kay Crabaugh of Shawnee; and Barb Spencer of Overland Park. Fort Hays State University President Dr. Edward Hammond and Chad Harris of Kansas City were in with the National Collegiate Fraternities and Sororities to visit about legislation I am sponsoring to make contributions for infrastructure and safety improvements to collegiate housing tax-deductible.

Brian Black, Janet Lloyd-Williams, Linda Grant and Frankie Brown of Wichita were in with the Urban League of Kansas to present the 2007 State of Black America report. Mike Beam of Topeka was in with the Kansas Livestock Association (KLA) to discuss KLA's conservation program priorities for the 2007 Farm Bill. Steve Johnson of Lawrence was in with the Kansas Gas Service to tell me about a planned natural gas and liquefied natural gas pipeline that will cross Kansas. Jim French of Partridge was in with OxFam to talk about this year's farm bill. Joe Michaels of Emporia and Clarence Matlock of Chanute were in with the American Cable Association to discuss issues important to the cable television industry.

A group of Kansans concerned about Farm Service Agency office closings were in to tell me about their visit with USDA officials. In with the group were Lyle Burkhart of Cottonwood Falls; Lance and Tori Burkhart of Strong City; Marvin Beesley of Gove; Timothy James Steele of Yates Center; Ben Bennett of Junction City; Vienna Lee, Tammy Hardy and Bob and Dian Boaldin of Elkhart; and Elizabeth Hendricks of Howard. Members of the Kansas City Board of Public Utilities were in to discuss water resource projects on the Kansas and Missouri Rivers. In with the group were Joseph Dick and Jim Epp of Kansas City, Mike Armstrong of Lenexa and David Egger of Overland Park.

David Kennedy of Overland Park, President of the Military Officers Association of America's Kansas Council of Chapters, was in to share his organization's support for measures to improve health care, retirement benefits and pay for current and former service members. State Representative Stephanie Sharp and Angela Kreps of Lenexa were in with the Kansas Bioscience Organization to tell me about new bioscience industry projects in our state. Kimberly Gencur of Topeka was in with ITC Great Plains to discuss their proposed electrical transmission line projects in Kansas. Donna Bales of Wichita and Sandy Kuhlman of Phillipsburg were in with Hospice Services, Inc. to talk about Medicare payments for hospice care.

Dr. William Clifford of Garden City and Dr. Susan Moser of Manhattan were in with the American Academy of Ophthalmology to advocate for changes to the formula Medicare uses to reimburse physicians. Kansas representatives of the National Telecommunications Cooperative Association were in to discuss possible changes to the Universal Service Fund, which helps provide communication access to rural America. In with the group were Catherine Moyer and Dick Veach of Ulysses, Greg Aldridge of Arkansas City, Terry Force of Wheaton, Dale Hudson of Brewster, Mike and Connie VanCampen of Turon, Shawna Marlow of Sylvia and Steve and Tina Davis of Medicine Lodge. Shelley Stafford of Hays was also in to visit.

Several Kansans stopped by my Washington, D.C. office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol, including Lance and Tori Burkhart of Turon and Lyle Burkhart of Cottonwood Falls. In from Hays were Mickey and Susie Billinger, Al and Sue Pfeifer, and Ed and Mary Hammond, who brought by two Chinese exchange students, Wayne Wang and Helen Su. Doyle and Charlotte Rahjes of Agra also came by with their daughter, Lori Ferguson of Agra, and granddaughter, Sarah Rahjes of Nebraska.

Very truly yours,

Jerry